



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

April 7, 2020

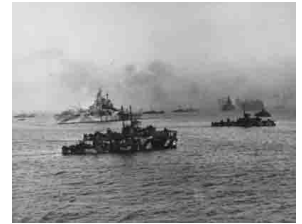


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Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website (history.navy.mil), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ H-Gram 044: "Floating Chrysanthemums"—The Naval Battle of Okinawa

In his latest H-Gram, NHHC Director [Sam Cox](#) covers the first three weeks of the U.S. invasion of Okinawa, which took place in late March through early June 1945. The [Battle for Okinawa](#) was the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War with more than 4,900 U.S. Navy Sailors killed in action. The Navy suffered more casualties than the U.S. Army (4,675) and Marine Corps (2,938) did in the land battle. Nearly the entire Japanese garrison (77,000) was killed, along with about half the civilian population of Okinawa. The island was a key stepping stone for the planned invasion of the Japanese mainland scheduled for later that year. To accomplish the mission, the Navy had to transport, supply, and defend more than half a million U.S. Army troops and Marines over vulnerable logistics lines thousands of miles long. In addition, the Navy had to defend forces on the ground while in range of thousands of Japanese aircraft, whose kamikaze attacks made them much more lethal than conventional attacks. For more, [read H-Gram 044](#) at the [Director's Corner](#).



★ WWII@75: TF 58 Sinks *Yamato*

On April 7, 1945, Fast Carrier Task Force 58 aircraft attacked the Japanese First Diversion Attack Force and sank Japanese battleship *Yamato*. Despite the battleship's considerable firepower, *Yamato*'s inexperience and ill-trained crew was little match for [U.S. naval aviators](#). The gem of the Japanese fleet was pounded with five bombs and ten torpedoes before finally sinking to the bottom of the ocean. Most of the other ships in the Japanese force fared similarly, with only four destroyers surviving the onslaught. By the battle's end, an estimated 3,665 Japanese sailors lost their lives (including roughly 2,500 on board *Yamato*). For more, check out the [Battle for Okinawa](#) page at [NHHC's website](#).



★ Happy 120th Birthday, Submarine Force

On April 11, 1900, the U.S. Navy officially joined the undersea world when it purchased the submarine [Holland](#). The boat, designed by John P. Holland, proved valuable for experimental purposes during her 10-year career. Submarines did not play a large role in [World War I](#), but they played a huge role during [World War II](#). [Assessments](#) indicated that U.S. submarines sank 540,192 tons of Japanese naval vessels and 4,779,902 tons of merchant shipping during the course of the war, accounting for 54.6 percent of all Japanese vessel losses. [USS Nautilus](#)—developed by [Hyman G. Rickover](#)—was the first nuclear-powered submarine and the first submarine to cross the North Pole under the Arctic polar ice pack. [USS George Washington](#) made history on July 20, 1960, when she successfully launched the first *Polaris* from a submerged submarine. The Tomahawk land-attack missile was later developed and was first used by submarines in combat during [Desert Storm](#) by [USS Louisville](#) and [USS Pittsburgh](#). Happy birthday, [submarine force](#).



★ Weathering the Storm Aboard USS Constitution

During this troubling time, [USS Constitution](#) has been closed to the public in an effort to protect guests and the crew. However, the crew has adapted, providing daily [Facebook Live](#) tours to continue the mission of promoting the Navy, *Constitution*, and America's rich maritime heritage. "It's been our honor to continue to tell the story of Old Ironsides, provide an educational resource for children home from school, and to entertain our supporters throughout the crisis," according to Cmdr. John Benda, commanding officer of *Constitution*.



“We will weather this storm together.” The Facebook Live tours can be viewed daily at 1 p.m. For more, [read the blog](#) by Benda at [The Sextant](#).

★ **Historic Ship *Nautilus* Opened**

On April 11, 1986, [historic ship *Nautilus*](#) opened to the public at the [Submarine Force Museum](#) in Groton, CT. *Nautilus* was the world’s first nuclear powered submarine and took nearly 18 months to construct. On July 23, 1958, *Nautilus* departed Pearl Harbor, HI, under secret orders to conduct “Operation Sunshine”—the first crossing of the North Pole by a ship. On Aug. 3, *Nautilus* commanding officer, Cmdr. [William Anderson](#), announced to his 116-member crew, “For the world, our country, and the Navy—the North Pole.” *Nautilus* accomplished the impossible, reaching the geographic North Pole, 90 degrees north. Over the course of her 25 years of service, *Nautilus* was involved in a variety of developmental testing programs and was the first nuclear powered submarine assigned to Sixth Fleet. On March 3, 1980, *Nautilus* was decommissioned after steaming over half a million miles. *Nautilus* was designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior on May 20, 1982.



★ **WWII@75: FDR Dies**

On April 12, 1945, President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) died at Warm Springs, GA. He was the nation’s longest serving president, serving nearly four terms. Born Jan. 30, 1882, at Hyde Park, NY, Roosevelt attended Harvard University and Columbia Law School. Following his fifth cousin’s example—President Theodore Roosevelt—Roosevelt entered public service by winning the election to the New York Senate in 1910. In 1920, President Woodrow Wilson appointed him the assistant secretary of the Navy. He became governor of New York in 1928 and, in November 1932, Roosevelt was elected president of the United States. He is credited with the “New Deal” program and leading the country through [World War II](#). His death left Vice President Harry S. Truman in charge of the country.



★ **Apollo 13 Launched 50 Years Ago**

On April 11, 1970, [Apollo 13](#) launched. Capt. [James A. Lovell Jr.](#) served as commander, and former [naval aviator](#) Fred W. Haise Jr. was the lunar module pilot. While 200,000 miles from Earth, there was an explosion on board, which forced Apollo 13 to circle the moon without landing. Mission duration was 5 days, 22 hours, and 54 minutes. The mission was deemed a “successful failure.” HS-4 helicopters made recovery of the capsule from [USS *Iwo Jima*](#). The 1995 film [Apollo 13](#) depicted the ordeal. For more on the [Navy’s role in space exploration](#), go to [NHHC’s website](#).



★ **WWII@75: *Mannert L. Abele* Sank**

On April 12, 1945, [USS *Mannert L. Abele*](#) was the first U.S. Navy ship sunk by a piloted bomb (not a kamikaze), off [Okinawa](#). The deadly flying rocket bomb—one of the first “cruise missiles”—was the latest in the Japanese arsenal designed to cause fear and inflict maximum carnage on the Allies. With a wingspan of 16 feet, the Yokosuka MXY-7 *Ohka* (Cherry Blossom) was small (approximately 19 feet in length). It was incredibly fast, reaching speeds of up to 425 mph in level flight and more than 600 mph in a dive. Typically, they were carried and launched from underneath Mitsubishi G4M2 Type I land attack planes. *Ohka* pilots would detach from the bomb and begin a low-glide toward a target before the pilot switched on its three solid-fuel rockets. Carrying a 2,645-lb. warhead, the goal of *Ohka* pilots was simply to smash into, destroy, and sink Allied vessels. The rockets were hard to shoot down because of their ability to fly at extremely high speeds.



★ **Attack Submarine *Delaware* Joins the Fleet**

The Navy commissioned the 18th Virginia-class attack [submarine](#), April 4. USS *Delaware* was commissioned administratively due to restrictions on large gatherings during the coronavirus pandemic. “This Virginia-class fast-attack submarine will continue the proud naval legacy of the [state of Delaware](#) and the ships that have borne her name,” said Acting Secretary of the Navy [Thomas B. Modly](#). “I am confident that the crew of this cutting edge platform will carry on this tradition, confronting the many challenges of today’s complex



world with the professionalism and agility the American people depend on from the warriors of the silent service.” For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#).

★ WWII Vet, 95, Makes Full Recovery From COVID-19

As good news has become a scarce commodity at this time in our history, a [World War II](#) veteran who recently made a full recovery after being diagnosed with COVID-19 thinks otherwise. “I survived the foxholes of [Guam](#), I can get through this coronavirus bulls--t,” said Bill Kelly, according to his granddaughter Rose Etherington. Kelly, 95, began feeling ill on March 15 with a low-grade fever. His family took him to the hospital for treatment, and he subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. He returned home on March 30 and, according to his family, is doing well. During the war, Kelly served as a [Seabee](#) in the Pacific theater. He stormed the beaches of Guam with Marines during the amphibious assault of the island. “His dream is to see Americans supporting one another through this time,” Etherington said. “He likes to see that old American fight again!” For more, [read the article](#) in *Military Times*.



★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

This week’s Webpage of the Week is a new entry on NHHC’s [DANFS](#) index. Named in honor of former Secretary of State Daniel Webster, [USS Daniel Webster](#) was commissioned on April 9, 1964. Over the course of the [submarine’s](#) active service, *Daniel Webster* was involved in 77 deterrent patrols, conducted the first submerged launch of an improved production version of the *Polaris*, and became the first of two nuclear submarines—the other [USS Guardfish](#)—to meet in the Panama Canal. The ship’s namesake represented New Hampshire and Massachusetts in the U.S. Congress and served as Secretary of State under Presidents William Harrison, John Tyler, and Millard Fillmore. NHHC historian Christopher J. Martin authored the history.



★ Today in Naval History

On April 7, 1990, 30 years ago, the Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine [USS Albany](#) was commissioned at Naval Station Norfolk, VA. The [submarine](#) carried out her maiden deployment to the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean, July 22—Dec. 24, 1992, participating in NATO multithreat exercise *Display Determination*. On July 20, 2005, *Albany* launched an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) while she operated on the surface. The test demonstrated some of the tactical advantages conferred by deploying UAVs from attack submarines. “This technology extends the submarine’s reach. We already pride ourselves on being stealthy,” Lt. Cmdr. Rob Jezek, *Albany’s* executive officer, explained, “and the Advanced Tactical Recce capability within the UAV adds to our range of senses. It has many implications, including the ability to gather intelligence and perform advanced reconnaissance for [Special Operations Forces](#) insertion.” In 2010, during a deployment to Northern European waters, *Albany* spent more than 30 days operating above the Arctic Circle while steaming in the Norwegian Sea.



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance](#) at [NHHC’s website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.